

Clete (their neighbor) came walking out of his garage and had to do a little side step to keep from getting splattered. He threw his weed whip down and said, "What the hell do you thing you're doing, Ellis?"

"Next time that mutt of yours lays a load on my lawn, I'm going to make you eat it, Clete old boy." said Ellis.

Juanita heard the word 'mutt' come through the screen door to the dining room where she was ironing and came charging out onto the front lawn. She flung Clete aside like he was a rag doll. She stood in front of Ellis, shaking with rage, "What'd you call my Ginger?"

Ellis got the shovel up in front of himself for protection and started to back slowly away.

Ruth got in front of him and said to Juanita, "Why don't you pick on someone your own size, fatso?"

"Fatso, is it?" said Juanita.

"Like two sumo wrestlers in muu muus meeting at a full charge." That's how Jeffrey would describe it to his mother later that night. He threw the newspapers on their lawns and peddled off, in no mood to witness carnage that day.

There was a thunderclap of flesh colliding.

Clete sidled up to Ellis, taking his wallet out of his pants. "I got twenty bucks says Juanita mops the place up with her." The women were at a standstill, chest to chest, grunting, digging, tearing up the lawn.

Ellis said, "Make it forty."

"Done."

Ginger watched through the venetian blinds, licked her chops, scratched her belly with a hind leg. She'd just finished a two-pound T-bone and couldn't wait for tomorrow morning.

SCUFFLING UNDER THE BOUGAINVILLEA

Dave, the neighbors' cat, has got his head buried in Ellis' trash can, ass sticking up in the sair. Ellis comes out with a big cup of steaming black coffee, on his way to work. He sees Dave and screams, "Get out of

there you son-of-a-bitch," and not seeing anything handy to throw at him throws his car keys, completely confident of a direct hit. They miss and sail into the street, hitting the grill of a new black Buick that's driving by, sticking there.

The Buick screeches to a halt. Jim jumps out, charging Ellis, screaming. "I just bought that car, you shithead."

He takes a big swing at Ellis. Ellis moves his head and Jim's fist hits the garage door, echoing around inside the garage, bringing Ruth away from her laundry out onto the front lawn at a full charge.

She turns to the left and then the right, still holding onto a pair of Ellis' stained, tattered underwear. Ellis is nowhere to be seen.

Then she hears a rustling and muffled curses coming from under the bougainvillae. She picks up the hose with the heavy metal lawn sprinkler attached to the end, swings it around over her head then brings it down parallel to the ground, swooping it under the rustling bush.

"AIEE."

The sprinkler hits Ellis on the temple, rattling his brains, making him lose the full nelson he's just gotten on Jim. Ruth swings and swoops the hose again, catching Jim on the eye this time. He comes out from under the bush like a rabbit with a hungry coyote on his tail, leaving a trail of purple blossoms all the way out to his car. He jumps in and pounds the gas, squealing on out of there.

Ruth reaches under the bougainvillae and drags Ellis, semiconscious, out onto the sidewalk: "Quit grab-assing around and get your dumb, lazy butt to work, Ellis." She wondered who the skinny little weasel was who'd come charging out from under there holding his eye.

Jim pulls the Buick over in the parking lot of the taco stand. His eye is swelling quickly. He can't see out of it now. He doesn't know what the fuck hit him, figures that asshole had some brass knuckles or something. "Gonna buy me a gun," he says to himself, "No more fist fights for me."

He goes up to the window of the taco stand to get a cup of ice to put on his eye. The girl behind the counter says she has to charge him for a drink because that's the way they do their inventory, by counting the cups.

So he pays seventy-nine cents for a cup of ice.

"Your eye looks terrible," she says, handing him his change.

"Hurts like a son-of-a-bitch too," he says. He walks back out to the new Buick, pressing the cold cup to his face. He gets in, starts her up and pulls back out onto the street. He notices an irritating rattling noise coming from up front somewhere.

"Hell's bells," he says, "This just ain't my day."

CLETE AND JUANITA GO TO THE MALL

"Who is the animal?" said Clete, fanning the air in front of his face with his hand.

He and Juanita and Ginger (Juanita's Chihuahua) were in the elevator in the big department store in the mall. It was crowded. They were packed in like sardines. Clete had just passed a large amount of really foul smelling gas and was trying to blame it on someone else. It was an old trick of his.

Juanita was embarrassed to tears (or was it the toxic vapors burning her eyes?).

Ginger just hunkered down on the floor with her paws over her face.

The fart hung there like a wet heavy fog. A short fat lady in the back fainted. A tall grey-haired man beside Juanita stuck his tie in his mouth, held his nose and pounded the wall.

"Jeez, what a pig," said Clete, looking around the elevator. The doors opened.

"Oh thank God," said a little bearded man, dashing out into lingerie.

"Some people got no class," said Clete, looking around accusingly as his fellow riders stampeded by.

"You are a disgusting, flatulent, porcine piece of armadillo dung," said Juanita, walking by him, dragging Ginger, who had gone into a coma, by the leash out into the store.

Clete stood there and smiled, smoothed his hair back and said to himself, "I don't know what porcine means, but whatever it is, if it's good, I'm it."